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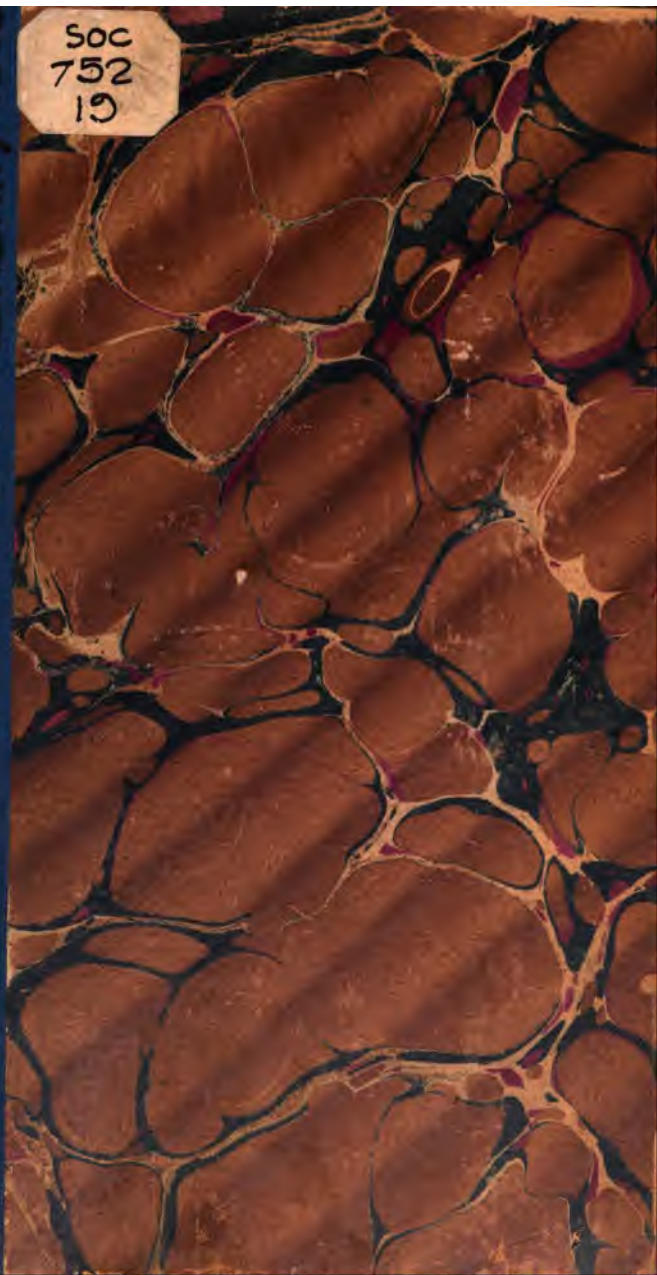
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SOCIALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

BY

W. CUNNINGHAM, D.D., F.B.A.

ARCHDEACON OF ELY, FORMERLY PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS IN KING'S
COLLEGE, LONDON, AND LECTURER IN ECONOMIC HISTORY
IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY

LONDON

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, W.C.

1909

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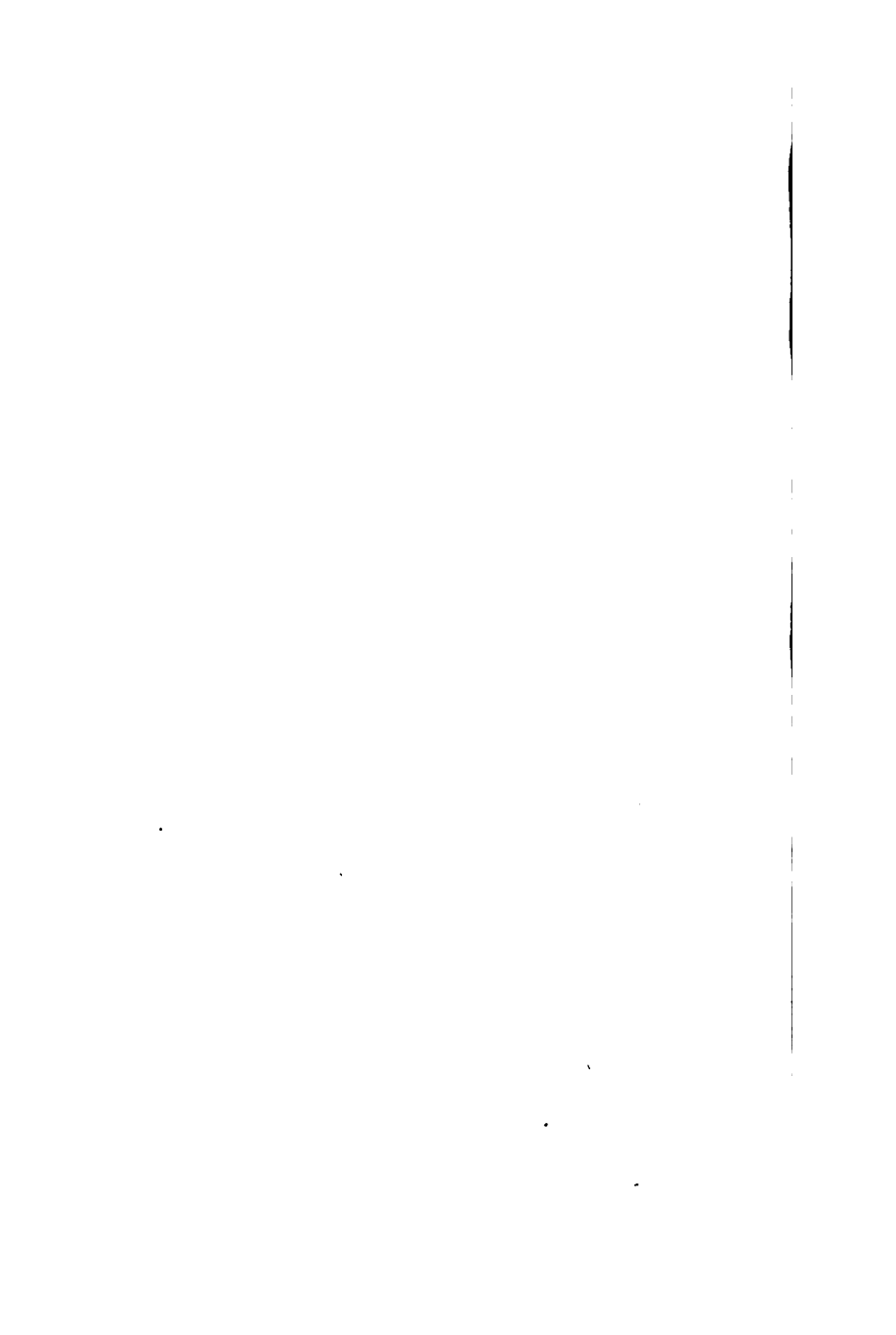
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SOCIALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

I. Reason for the Rapid Growth of Socialism in England.

FEW occurrences in the history of the English people have been more remarkable than the rapid strides which have been made by Socialism in capturing public opinion, and becoming a great political force during the last thirty years. In 1879 it had hardly any footing in England at all; the ordinary newspaper reader regarded it as a craze which took possession of hysterical foreigners, but which had no attraction for the common sense of Englishmen. Trade Union policy was entirely uninfluenced by it in the days of the Junta,* and till the *Fabian Essays* were published in 1889 there was little evidence that its doctrines had any hold in literary circles. But the world has moved since then; many measures have been passed by Parliament which the last generation would have condemned as Socialistic; and in any gathering of

* S. and B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 215.

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who have not shared in political power themselves are apt to attribute the failure to introduce more general conditions of welfare to the indifference, or the selfishness, or the greed of citizens who are well-to-do. When the classes which had hitherto been unrepresented began to realize their strength, they were inclined to put forward proposals for the material welfare of the community generally, in many directions—as, for example, the housing of the poor. According to the older opinion it was impossible for the State to take up such matters wisely, and without the serious danger of doing in the long run more harm than good.

III. Economists as Critics and as Guides.

While then there has been a new incentive to the introduction into Parliament of schemes which a bygone generation would have denounced as Socialistic, there has been less facility for discussing them thoroughly and critically, owing to the changes which have taken place in the official study of Political Economy. The *laissez faire* doctrine had diverted scientific investigation from the empirical inquiries which can be most usefully undertaken; such are investigations as to the best means of attaining any particular material benefit—the maintaining rates of wages, the improvement of employment, and

the opening of new markets—or as to the best means of rendering small holdings profitable and so retaining the rural population upon the land. Much excellent work has been done on these topics and is recorded in the Reports of Royal and Parliamentary Commissions, but it has been undertaken by government officials, and does not fall within the scope of current economic science. The academic economists in England, under the influence of *laissez faire* principles, were not inclined to spend much time in studying the precise conditions of any industry or branch of commerce; they believed that the growth and decay of trades could be left to settle themselves. So far as practical life was concerned they were merely prepared to take the part of critics—to formulate the principles according to which the increase of national wealth would go on most rapidly—and to approve or condemn particular proposals by the application of these principles. They did not profess to lay down what ought to be done in regard to any matter, but only to criticize actual projects from a particular point of view; they held their standpoint was important, but they were careful to make clear that they did not regard it as the only standpoint. The Classical Economists dealt with one side of life—the pursuit of wealth—which was isolated for the sake of convenience of study; they had a strong position for negative criticism, by pointing out cases in which injury was likely to be done to national opulence—as, for example, war must injure it, for a

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that morality should be taken into account adequately, if it is dealt with at all. The old Political Economy did not pretend to deal with it, and disclaimed any pretension to use the word "ought"; the new Political Economy speaks with a less certain sound. The new Political Economy does not really leave room for the operation of Public Spirit or the Sense of Duty, because it professes to take account of them as utilities, and merges them all in the calculation of expediencies. The older economists could make clear what they were talking about,—what they left out of account temporarily, in order that proper stress might be laid upon it, at the proper time. Just because the older economists made it quite clear what they assumed and what they had before them, it is possible to learn a great deal even from their mistakes. It is very instructive to try to see how far a man like MacCulloch was mistaken, and why he was mistaken, and this is possible because his treatment was really scientific. But the new Political Economy never makes plain what it assumes; it is so far concerned with subjective forces that we can neither use it to explain the actual occurrences of the past, nor test it by recorded experience. I have argued elsewhere that in casting economic principles in this form there has been an abandonment of the scientific attitude, and that the result is a mere hybrid science.* This new

* *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 17. Compare also the criticisms of the new Political Economy by Prof. Nicholson, *Principles of Political Economy*, I. pp. 51-65; Prof. Ashley, *Presidential*

Political Economy fails to provide a good mental discipline in preparation for the investigation of the facts of actual life,* and has done much to divert economic study in England to lines that are unfruitful, but it has exercised a still more regrettable influence on the public mind. The fact that a new Political Economy has been put forward in academic circles has gone a long way to discredit the older doctrine. The Malthusian principles of population, and the law of diminishing return from land are in popular opinion part of the old Political Economy which has been abandoned, and it is supposed that they have ceased to deserve any attention. The body of Scientific principle, which had been established as the foundation for the criticism of practical proposals, has been abandoned, and there is no longer any recognized basis of organized knowledge from which to criticize the projects of any sentimental charlatan. Since the new Political Economy has come into vogue the warnings of the prophetic voice have been silenced, and the public are encouraged to hope that the much desired image will sooner or later be available, to go before the people to the promised land.

Address to Section F of British Association at Leicester, in *Economic Journal*, XI. ; and Mr. C. S. Devas, *Political Economy*, pp. 23, 129.

† See my article, "A Plea for Pure Science" in *Economic Review*, VI., Jan. 1892.

IV. The Temptation to blend Science and Religion.

The rapid progress of Socialism is sufficiently accounted for when we see that the government of the country has to a great extent passed into the hands of classes who have an exaggerated belief as to the work which the State can wisely attempt to do ; while the old scientific standpoint, from which its projects can be effectively criticized and rightly appreciated, has been officially abandoned. To a very large number of educated persons it has come as something of a relief to feel that they are now set free from any intellectual obligation to refrain from advocating proposals to which they are impelled by a sentiment in favour of the less unequal distribution of wealth, and by their sympathy for the poor. In so far as they had read Political Economy, *e.g.* in John Stuart Mill, they had found much of it clear and convincing ; but yet there seemed to be a blot upon it from its persistence in studying the effects of self-interest ; and in so far as it was popularly made a basis for, or a justification of, practical conduct, it was clearly unchristian. The new Political Economy has seemed to remove the old blot, and to present the truth about material wealth in forms in which it is easily compatible with Christianity. Hence to many minds there appears to be good hope that it may now be possible to devise a gospel of material welfare which shall be in accordance with Christianity. The example of the Free

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Trade era, and the positive preaching of an economic doctrine which carried in its wake the hopes of universal peace between nations, gave a sort of inspiration as to what might be attempted in regard to the reorganization of society within the realm. Though the superficial observer may not remark upon it, a little reflection shows that the fundamental principles of Free Trade are the accepted axioms of Socialism ; and the consciousness that this was the case has rendered a large section of the educated public ready to believe that Economic Science was in favour of both one and the other. Hence it appeared that science and religion might be united in advocating, not perhaps the extreme views of anarchists, but the milder form of revolution, which professes to be a Christian Socialism. It may be worth while to consider very briefly whether this new doctrine has a sound basis in science, and whether it is really compatible with Christianity as a philosophy of life.

V. Is Popular Socialism really Scientific ?

There is undoubtedly much in the present industrial system that must be regarded as wasteful, and if society were better organized much of the money that is now spent in pushing the goods of particular firms, and much of the uncertainty in business, with the fluctuations in trade, might be at all events reduced ;

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though it may be doubted whether any organization could get rid of them altogether. In so far as State Socialism or Municipal Socialism can supply a system of administration which meets these defects, and enables the business of the country to be better carried on,—with less waste, and equally effectively as regards the requirements of the public—it would approve itself. In so far as Socialism could get similar results by less wasteful methods it would prove itself economical ; and hence all the economic criticism of the existing system may be regarded as an invitation to suggest and to attempt an experiment that shall prove itself better, and hold its own against other competitors. That is a process that is going on every day, in the state management of the telephone and telegraph service, and in the municipalization of electric lighting and power, and tramways. There are some people who believe it is going on too fast, and that some of the alleged savings are unreal ; but the two alternatives of public management and private enterprise are to be tested by economic considerations, and it is probable that one may be preferable to the other in communities of different types, according to the habits and degrees of education which are current among the people.

(a) *The Principles Adopted.*

When, however, we pass from the criticism of the existing order to approval of plans for the reconstruction of society, it is impossible to appeal to

Economic Science with any confidence. The underlying principles, which have been put forward by the advocates of Free Trade, and which are adopted by Christian Socialists, are not matters on which Economic Science speaks decidedly, or on which it can claim to say the last word.

1. Free Traders are inclined to look entirely to the consumer as the only person to be thought of when we are considering the success of our trade policy. It is clear that all the inhabitants of the realm are consumers though not all are producers of material goods, and therefore from this standpoint, account seems to be taken of the requirements of all members of the community, and not of any particular section. The advocates of Free Trade assumed that in the present constitution of society—with individual enterprise and competition—production was sure to go on, and that under a Free Trade system every kind of production would be carried on in the place to which it was best adapted. But it is a somewhat different thing to look principally at consumption and the distribution of the wealth already acquired, when we are discussing the reconstitution of society. Production and consumption are both phases in the process of economic life; but the important thing economically for the maintenance of society and for its progress is that there should be favourable conditions for production; the more distribution is improved so as to be as little unequal as maybe—or so that whatever inequalities exist can be justified as reasonable and

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right—the better; but if production is injuriously affected, there will be less material wealth available, and a diminution of average material well-being. If we are looking to the future and to the organization of society, the important thing is, not to lay stress on consumption, but to make sure that the production of useful things, so that they shall be available for distribution, goes on steadily and well. Consumption looks to present conditions and the wealth that has been acquired, production looks to the future, and the prosperity of society in the long run. It is, of course, conceivable that Socialism may in some circumstances and conditions supply a greatly improved organization for production, and, therefore, an increased mass of wealth, and it is particularly unfortunate that Socialistic writers and speakers at present are so much inclined to dwell on the advantage of a better distribution of wealth among consumers, and are not at more pains to show that the stimulus to efficiency in production will be maintained under their new system.

2. Economic Science may have much to say about the production, distribution, and exchange of wealth, whatever kind of community is taken as the unit. In the ancient world, and in mediæval times, the city was a convenient unit for most economic purposes; with the rise of nationalities, in modern times, the nation has come to be a convenient unit, both for political and for economic purposes. But the advocates of Free Trade have taken a somewhat

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new departure in treating the world, as a whole, as the unit they have in view ; * they are inclined to disparage the attempt to promote the wealth and power of any one country and to view all as contributing to, and drawing from, the common stock of the world as a whole. This cosmopolitan habit of mind is also adopted by Socialists, who are inclined to disparage patriotic sentiment, and to propose a system which takes no account of difference of race and history. But, after all, the cosmopolitanism of Free Traders assumed the continued existence of nations ; each one of which should be part of a complex system, and bound to the other members by ties of commercial connection. It is not quite clear what the relation of each commune or nation to the others would be, in a Socialist system, how far each would lead an independent economic life, or how far there would be trade relations between different communities. In both cases there is a disparagement of patriotism, and the advocacy of something which is regarded as desirable for all men everywhere, but in Socialist systems the relations of the smaller centres of organization to one another and to the whole are not easy to apprehend.

3. Free Traders have been confident that if certain material conditions are introduced they will react so

* In 1891, when I gave a presidential address to the Economic Section of the British Association at Cardiff on "Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Economics" (*Statistical Society's Journal*, liv, 644), I did not realize as clearly as I do now, the grave evils which are inevitably connected with cosmopolitanism, or the practicability of treating the Empire as an economic unit.

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as to bring about a change of sentiment. It was argued that the mutual interdependence of nations for purposes of trade would tend to create friendly feelings which would render international quarrels impossible. In a similar fashion the Socialist holds that if an equality of condition is imposed, a sense of brotherhood will be developed among all citizens, and that in these circumstances public spirit, instead of individual success, will become an effective motive to induce men to engage in strenuous work. It may perhaps be doubted, especially when we remember the threatened coalition against us at the outbreak of the Boer War, whether fifty years of Free Trade have disarmed all jealousy of this country in the minds of foreigners, or created a sympathetic enthusiasm all over the world for the prosperity of the British Empire ; but even assuming that this has been the case, it can hardly be regarded as certain that a similar love of one's neighbours would be engendered even after the transition to Socialism should be complete. It would hardly be likely to arise till the old order had been completely forgotten ; in some minds a sense of injustice would rankle ; in others there might be disillusionment and disappointment. It does not seem clear that a stronger sense of brotherhood and desire to engage in self-sacrifice for the common cause would be called forth universally by the mere force of changed circumstances. There is much to be said for the view that " life developes from within " ; and that an enthusiasm in the heart, however kindled, will act on the will,

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and find expression in action. But there is little reason to believe that the connection also works in the opposite direction, and that we can supply material conditions which will call forth a change of aspiration. At all events, this speculation takes us into the domain of psychology, in which economic science is a learner, not an authority. The principles which are common to Free Traders and to Socialists are not so scientifically established that the vaunted success of the one system in one part of the world can give us much confidence in the wisdom of attempting, under similar guidance, to reconstruct society everywhere.

(b) *The Grounds of its Practical Proposals.*

Socialists not only appear to accept as axiomatic principles of economic policy that are after all highly questionable, but they propose to break so completely with the past that they cannot draw much upon recorded experience in devising their schemes for the future. We may sympathize with the recoil from *laissez faire*, and unrestricted competition, but these things are not essential to the existing social system. The doctrine of *laissez faire* was adopted by Adam Smith and many of his followers, as a counsel of prudence in regard to the best means of attaining opulence; but it has never been accepted by economists generally, and it has been discarded in Germany and America through the influence of List. Those who are dissatisfied with present conditions are not

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forced to look to Socialism as the only possible alternative. We ought all to recognize a duty on the part of the State, to control and regulate the manner in which private property is used, so as to ensure that it shall be employed in a manner that is advantageous to the community as a whole. As we continue to obtain better conceptions of human welfare, in all its aspects—physical and moral—and of the most effective means by which the State can direct and co-operate with the energy of individuals, we can draw steadily on the experience of the past in the effort to bring actual life into closer accord with our ideals. The improved means of communication in modern times render it possible to bring larger and larger areas under political control, and it is therefore possible to render them parts of one economic system. Under modern conditions of trade, neither the city nor even the nation afford a broad enough basis for a well-organized economic system; but the scientific study of the progress and decay of the wealth of city-states or of nations, will give us an insight into the of so ordering the material resources at o as to maintain and of self-government in other land island. We has been br past, and the absolute br new departu affords, if economic ar think imy he Empi We shall e unit Great

conomics, as an empirical science, gives us the means of learning from experience as to the best means of developing every part of the Empire, and of encouraging each part to co-operate for the good of the whole. This was the admirable scheme which was thought out by Mr. Wakefield; and with our longer experience and larger knowledge we ought to be able to do much to relieve the congestion, and unemployment at home, and at the same time to develop the more backward areas of the British Empire. Imperialists and Socialists are at one in rejecting the doctrine of *laissez faire*, but Imperialists desire to rely on the experience of the past to promote a clearly understood aim, while Socialism is necessarily a leap in the dark; so far as its constructive side goes, it can only offer us castles in the air which find little support from the organized study of actual experience.



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Economics, as an empirical science, gives us the means of learning from experience as to the best means of developing every part of the Empire, and of encouraging each part to co-operate for the good of the whole. This was the admirable scheme which was thought out by Mr. Wakefield ; and with our longer experience and larger knowledge we ought to be able to do much to relieve the congestion, and unemployment at home, and at the same time to develop the more backward areas of the British Empire. Imperialists and Socialists are at one in rejecting the doctrine of *laissez faire*, but Imperialists desire to rely on the experience of the past to promote a clearly understood aim, while Socialism is necessarily a leap in the dark ; so far as its constructive side goes, it can only offer us castles in the air which find little support from the organized study of actual experience.

VI. The contrast between Thorough-going Socialism and Christianity.

The attraction of Socialism lies, not in the reasoning which supports it, but in the hope it holds out, and the sense of duty it sometimes inspires. It is the form which the enthusiasm for humanity takes in the present day. With a strong sense of the grinding poverty and degradation in which millions of their fellow-men are sunk, the generous spirits of our day

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can hardly fail to be intensely eager to give to every human being the opportunity of developing the best that is in him, and of sharing in the heritage of culture and knowledge that has come to the heirs of all the ages. And this new and eager desire, which so many are hailing as a gospel, seems to have a very intimate relationship with Christianity. That, too, has been an "enthusiasm for humanity," it cherishes a hope for a new heaven, but it also labours for a new earth. The moral character of Socialism is high, its philanthropy is deep and genuine, as if it had the closest affinity with practical Christianity, so that to many clergy it seems possible to blend the two, and by their combined forces to bring about a new society that shall be better materially and more truly religious. If Socialism can be brought to accept the leadership of Christ, it seems that enormous progress might be made for the ennobling of man and the service of God.

On the other hand it appears that there are many Socialists who do not recognize this kinship, or desire to strengthen any affinities which may exist between Christianity and the movement they have at heart. They may indeed feel an admiration for the Founder of Christianity, but they believe that the movement He inaugurated has proved a failure, and that it is necessary to give their energies to something else. To their minds Christianity, as it is at the present time, is embodied in powerful institutions closely allied to the social forces which they find

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most hostile; and they believe that in its true inwardness, Christianity has little or nothing in common with Socialism. Personally, I believe that the insight of the non-Christian Socialist is not mistaken, whatever superficial resemblances there may be between Christian Philanthropy, and Socialistic schemes. I hold that Christianity is quite inconsistent with thorough-going Socialism as a doctrine of life, and that those Christians who dally with Socialism are in danger of losing their hold on the very essentials of Christianity.

The forms of Socialism are so various that it is not easy to indicate its essential character in a few words, but in all its shapes it aims at procuring more enjoyment for the mass of individuals—both intellectual and physical—by governmental action and organization. The range of its vision is bounded by the present world, and it neither knows nor greatly cares what there may be beyond. This attitude of mind is always tempting. Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die—but it is not Christian. Christianity holds to a belief in the reality of undying spiritual power; it insists that for every human being to order his life here as the beginning of an immortal life to come, is the true way of forming the noblest type of human character. Christianity recognizes the joy of life on earth—but does not admit that earth can give the best that man is capable of enjoying; and Christianity, if it is true to itself, must beware of a doctrine which tends to

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encourage men to set their affections on things of earth. That the Christian principle of aloofness from mundane things may seem to many to be mere hypocrisy, is true enough; but it is none the less the business of Christians personally to try to make that principle real in their own lives, and to be on their guard against any associations that may weaken it.

The ends in view of Socialism and of Christianity are different, and the proposed means for attaining them are quite distinct. Both aim at an improvement in society, but Socialists try to attain it by compelling other people to do their duty, Christianity by inducing every man to do his own. The method of compulsion is not altogether easy to justify; when it is no longer the suppression of a definite breach of the law of the land, but is dictated by considerations of expediency, it may insensibly become a well-meaning tyranny. In all taxation there is the depriving a man of a portion of his property; and many taxpayers are inclined to resent the demand that they should be forced to contribute towards objects of which they do not approve. Nor is it only in connection with the disposal of property that this difficulty arises; in a highly organized State-Socialism it would seem impossible to give much scope to the individual for choosing his own employment or distributing his own time. Perhaps the danger of tyrannical government by a bureaucracy is less formidable than that of bringing about a deterioration of character in those who grow up under a system which

gives insufficient scope for initiative and enterprise on the part of individuals. A highly organized society may be in danger of becoming mechanical, and of turning out citizens of one prevailing type.

Christianity on the other hand appeals to each individual personally by holding out an ideal, and stirring up his will ; it does not hope to accomplish its object by pressure from without, but by inspiration from within. And thus while Socialism is not obviously compatible with freedom, and hampers the growth of strenuous personalities, Christianity is liable to no such charge. Since Christianity endeavours to safeguard the inner freedom of every man, and to encourage the formation of strong personalities, the doctrine of Christ affords a basis for a morality that at once holds out the highest ideal, and points out the method by which we may make progress towards it. The schemes of the Socialist may bring about the embodiment of his ideals of human life in forms which would be too stereotyped to leave much room for further advance.

Since thorough-going Socialism is inconsistent with Christianity both in its aims and in the means on which it relies to attain them, there can be little call for the Christian to take an active part in the reconstruction of society on such a basis. But reconstruction is hardly in sight at present ; the Socialist feels that there is still much to be done in the preliminary work of clearing the ground and breaking the stability of the existing social order. Socialism has a destructive,

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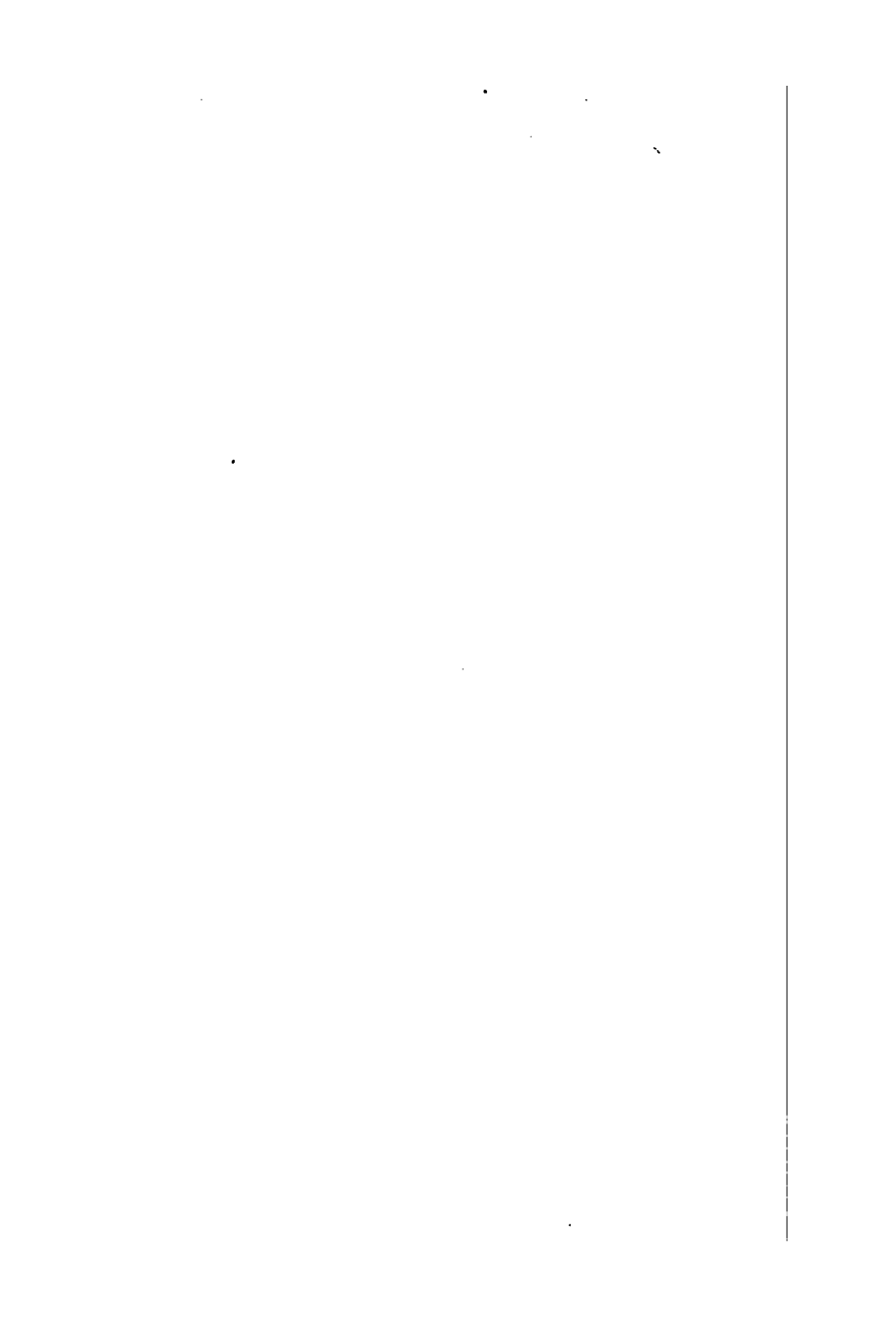
as well as a constructive side. Those who are unconvinced of the wisdom of Socialist schemes may yet think it possible to go half-way, and engage in active attacks on the evils of the day, in the hope that something better may eventually be found to take the place of existing institutions. This is the attitude of the Anarchist; but it is surely impossible for any one to take this line in the name of Christ; a Christian Anarchist seems almost a contradiction in terms. The characteristic feature of Christ's work and life, and of His commission to His followers, is the fostering of what is good so that it may outgrow the evil; He did not commend as worthy of imitation the action of the Old Testament prophets in calling down fire from heaven to destroy evil. He did not profess to remedy injustice directly in the division of an inheritance, but He gave us the hope that the Divine Spirit working in the hearts of men can regenerate Society.* Though His followers should of course be good citizens, and take part with Jews, Turks, infidels, and others in wise attempts to suppress wrong, it is not specially incumbent on the Christian, as a Christian, to denounce evil instead of trying to overcome it with good. Omniscient insight is needed to discriminate the wheat from the tares as they grow together, and private persons are not called to arrogate to themselves the power of taking vengeance on guilt. If constructive Socialism is different in aims and in

* See my paper on "Christianity and Modern Society Ideals" in *The Cure of Souls*, p. 170.

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methods from Christian teaching, Socialism on its destructive side is wholly alien to the Christian spirit.

As against Socialism, Christianity is to-day the most effective guardian of reliance on personal energy and personal character as powers which can leaven the world with good ; and those who deplore the slow progress that is made, who are in danger of losing heart, and inclined to combine Christian sentiments with Socialistic methods, may do well to bear in mind the old warning against undue haste. The delays in realizing the Christian aims are partly moral, and due to the weakness of human will ; but they have also been intellectual on the part of those who in one age after another have striven to render Christianity more conformable to current habits of thought. We shall do well to strive to be faithful to the trust we have received, rather than allow ourselves to engage in the perilous attempt to accommodate Christian aims and efforts to the spirit of the present day.



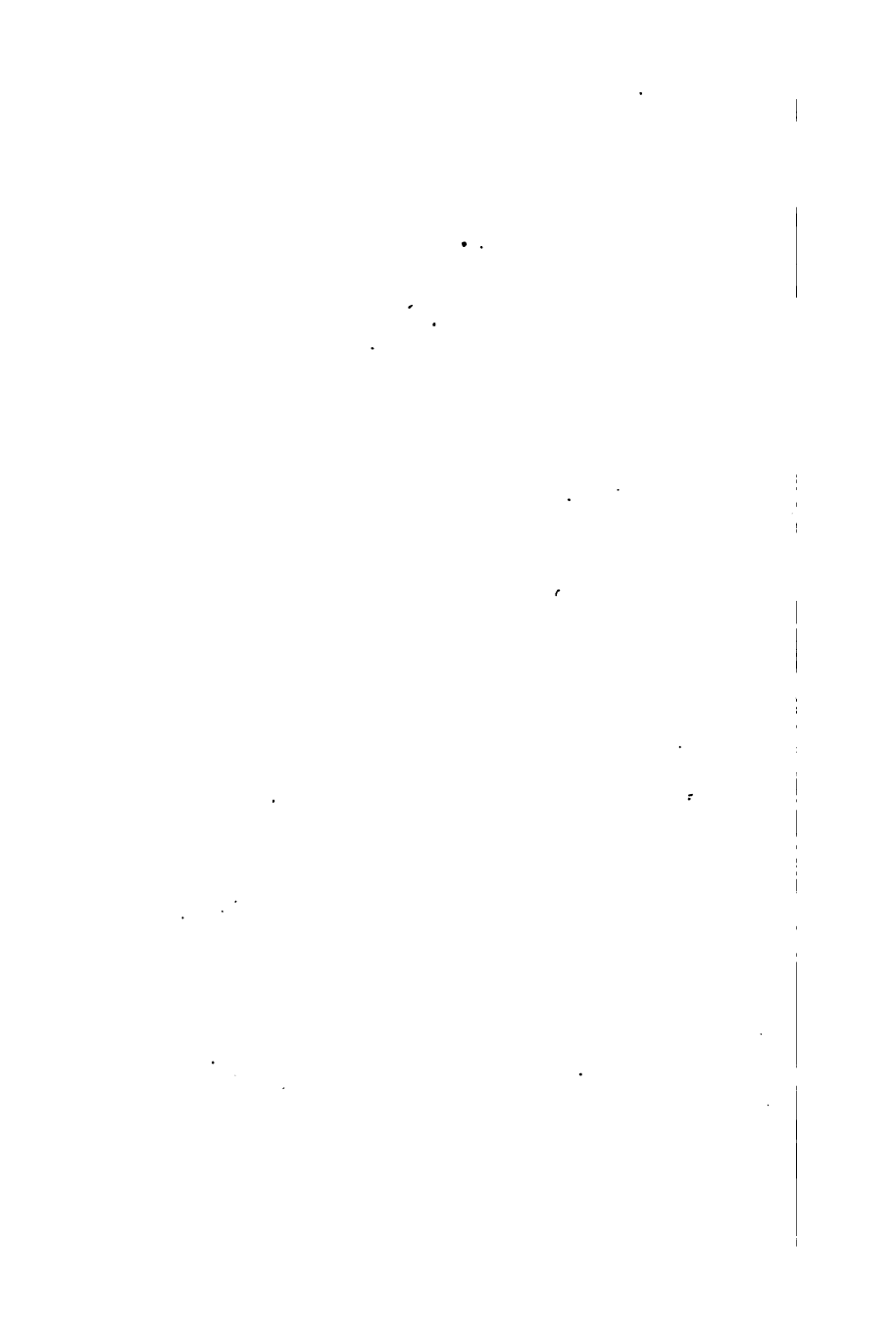


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forced to look to Socialism as the only possible alternative. We ought all to recognize a duty on the part of the State, to control and regulate the manner in which private property is used, so as to ensure that it shall be employed in a manner that is advantageous to the community as a whole. As we continue to obtain better conceptions of human welfare, in all its aspects—physical and moral—and of the most effective means by which the State can direct and co-operate with the energy of individuals, we can draw steadily on the experience of the past in the effort to bring actual life into closer accord with our ideals. The improved means of communication in modern times render it possible to bring larger and larger areas under political control, and it is therefore possible to render them parts of one economic system. Under modern conditions of trade, neither the city nor even the nation afford a broad enough basis for a well-organized economic system; but the scientific study of the progress and decay of the wealth of city-states or of nations, will give us an insight into the best way of so ordering the means and resources at our command as to maintain and improve in other lands the heritage of our own country. The system has been built up in this island, and we need not make an absolute breach with the past, but we can improve it, affords, if we make a new start, and think imperially on economic questions. We shall then take the case of Great Britain, as the

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